

Zenith The Meadow

Chapter 1 - On The Edges Of Death, There Are Lights

The basement vigil has been lit for 3 and a half years. It was September 24, 2002. That was the day they died. I didn't used to be so introspective. I used to smile all the time. I used to be carefree. I used to be a father. I was an engineer. I was worried about test results, machines, structures, working 9 to 5 and getting home to my wife and kids. I am no longer that man.

Three years ago, fatherhood was taken from me. My wife has spun into a deep depression and here I am - trying to make sense of it all.

More and more, though, I've found myself looking into myself. Where do you run to when everything has been taken from you?

I flash back to that moment a lot, on the side of the road, with nothing but blood and glass shards all over me and my wife. The ambulance seemed to be there seconds later - but it didn't matter. They were gone.

They are gone. My lovely daughters.

But what am I to do? End everything? Stop living? My wife has given up. And yet...somehow...in this darkness....there are lights.

Chapter 2 - Endeavour To Fly

I've been told to have faith. I've been told that everything will work out in its own time. But what is faith? I stumbled on to a back alley church service, happening in the din of a dark city alleyway, amidst stray cats, blind beggars and hypodermic needles. The people were crammed into a tiny room like sweaty rats. The yelling is what attracted me. I was walking home from work and it sounded like a man was dying. My curiosity got the best of me. I snuck in the back and watched. No one noticed me there. The room was an old converted bar and the preacher was standing on the sawdusty, caken bar rail, and sweating buckets more than everybody else. His eccentricity made me feel ill at ease. But one thing I do remember him saying was 'We will all try to fly. Yes we will. We will keep trying. Yes we will. Because one day, we will fly. YES! We WILL fly! There will come a day-uh. Where we don't NEED faith-uh! Because on that glorious day, faith-uh will cease to exist-uh! We won't need to believe because God-uh will be RIGHT IN FRONT OF US-UH!' I snuck back out before anyone noticed my presence. My trench coat absorbed the evening rain.

I felt a little lighter.

Chapter 3 - End Of All Things

I want judgment. I want those bastards who hit my car, with me and my family in it, to pay. I want them to pay dearly. Those drunken teenage bastards. They barely even got injured. What a joke. More and more, I am convinced that everything we do and have done will one day re-appear. It HAS to. Otherwise, we are all floating bridges on seas of unaccountability. I want to wring their necks. I want ...at times...to take their lives. But I am prevented in doing so by societal laws. And I must wait. My wife hasn't spoken for three days. She is in a downward spin, recently. She pretends they are at the dinner table. I wish those drunken idiots could see how we are now. I wish they could know the depths of my hell.

I want it all to end.

Chapter 4 - Lonely With You

My wife. My dear lover. She has departed from her mind and her body and her soul. She wears a lot of black. The once lively, smiling creature has turned into a constant mourner living in my house. My vacant house. Many nights, I have sat with her, either at bedside, or sometimes on the cold hardwood floor - and I have been with her. But she is not with me. I just wish that she could see my loneliness too - for I could truly be lonely with her. We could be lonely together.

Chapter 5 - Oath

It pains me to say it, but lately I've been taking off my ring. I've been studying that metallic circle and wondering what it means. I want to scream my love for my bride - but I know that my words will fall on deaf ears. Because truly, even before our beautiful children came into this world for such a short time - it was us. Me and my wife. We vowed on that hot August day to be together - and to stick together - for better or for worse. Through sickness and health.

Chapter 6 - Between The Walls

After being down in this basement for so long, in my retreat from the world and all of my pain, I've realized that I am surrounded by something I used to love; music. The notes and tunes that used to cascade through this house have gone silent in the despair of the quiet vigil. Will music give me some temporary release? Some slight upturn? I stepped to the bookshelf behind me and found an old portable record player and a 45 trapped underneath it. The song is called 'Between The Walls'. I plop it on the dusty turntable and drop the needle. It pops and buzzes and spins into the sonic atmosphere. An acoustic guitar strums heavy and an electric soon accompanies. It sounds distant...but happy. The words ring

*out: 'You were always here / Between The Walls / In My sleep
even when I couldn't find you'.*

A tear cascades. My wife is not gone - and neither am I.

*We are still here. We have always been here. And so is the Love that
began us. We just need to find it.*

Chapter 7 - Megachernobyl

*A recent high-level engineering work project takes me on a plane, far
away from my wife and my problems to a place that I'd heard of but
never thought I'd ever inhabit - Chernobyl. Everything changed for
this place on April 25th in the year 1986. Walking through these
hollowed out halls is something that touches my soul - and still, I feel
empty. The tour leader talks away about reactor pressure, rotational
energy and angular momentum but I can't connect to the words. That
all changes, however, when I see the memorials and the pictures - the
pictures of the children. Disfigured, dismembered, swollen and scared. A
young boy, no older than 14, has a foot that is larger than 2 heads.*

*Early deaths. Such early deaths. So many died because of a test. And
suddenly, in the midst of all of this horrific imagery, I feel peace. I feel
something. I feel the voices of the children, blowing sweet whistling
melodies through these bleached halls. I hear them speaking to me. And
I speak back and say 'It's okay. Go back to where you came from.
You can't stay here. You are loved'. The voices leave and I'm*

standing with the pictures. I miss my daughters. I bet these children are missed by their parents too.

Chapter 8 - The Waves, They Come

And so it comes to this. Another work project has brought me here - to Indonesia - here on this present day of December 26th 2004 - but let me start with yesterday. Away from my wife for Christmas. Working. In the Paradise Village hotel. Yesterday, I spent Christmas eating room service and drafting a project manual. Yesterday, I talked to her on the phone and wished her a 'Merry Christmas' and heard her hoarsely wish it back. I swear I even heard a tiny laugh at one of my corny engineer jokes.

But that was yesterday.

Today, something has happened. Something horrible. Something that has such a magnitude that it will not translate well into writing. A massive wave has hit the shore a few feet from my hotel - but this is no ordinary wave. It is a wave of screams. A wave of terror. A wave of houses, mud, trees, cars and destitution. A wave the size of a galaxy. A wave filled with dead and dying people swimming for their lives. As I write this from the fourth floor, the waters are rising around me and the horror is getting closer.

Some are headed for the roof and I hear them scamper and holler and trample each other in the hallway. Pain. Scared. I called my wife but she did not answer and so I left her a voicemail telling her I love her.

My heart is empty. I feel peace even in the midst of screams and breaking glass. Is this it, God? Will I be joining my beloved children soon? Do I jump out of the window into the waters or do I wait for them to envelop me?

Is my pain almost over?

Chapter 9 - Wander Onward

As the waters began spilling over my hotel balcony, I closed my eyes - but when I came to, I was looking straight up at the sky with eyes open. A nurse put a cool bandage on my head and explained what happened. A large Jamaican man busted into my hotel room as he had seen me check in a few days before - and he carried my soaked body up 3 flights of stairs to the roof through waves, mud and refuse. The nurse told me calmly that the waters were subsiding and that rescue crews were on the way.

I had survived.

As I gathered enough energy to stand, I surveyed the destruction for miles around. Somehow, in the midst of all of this and so many people dying and drowning, I had survived. Tears began to fall down my face in a ceaseless, hot trickle. And in that moment, I turned and saw him - the man who saved me. He approached me, with tears in his eyes as well, and grappled me into his arms. I'll never forget what he said to me as I crumpled in his arms: 'We won't have to believe when God is right in front of us, brother.' I wept for what felt like a century - and he wept with me. The nurse reached across and tapped my shoulder lightly with a

cell phone in her hand. She had recovered my personal information when I was unconscious and my wife was on the phone. I could hear her crying - but it was a different sort of cry. It was a cry of joy. Even though I'd been with her for years, it was the first time I'd heard my wife's real voice in almost 5 years. She said she'd wandered away from the house for a walk to a creek we used to frequent and when she came back, the news was on. I told my love 'My dear - never stop wandering. I can't wait to wander onward...with you'.

10. Dancing Daughters Of The Field

And so it goes, and we have wandered on. I am back home now and taking less trips and more walks with my wife. The events of the past few years almost seem dreamlike - and in another way, they have been exactly like a dream come to life.

Speaking of dreams, I feel I should document one that I've been having for about a year now. In fact, after ordering Thai food for the first time in years, my wife and I are doing dishes in our kitchen together and sipping some after-dinner port. I decide to tell her about it.

'Darling, I've been having this dream'. She continues washing but with a much slower pace. 'In the dream, I am with my you in a beautiful meadow filled with wildflowers, willow trees and birds. As we sit on a picnic blanket, drinking champagne on a perfectly hot summer's day,

we hear laughing. As we look to the field, there they are - our two daughters - just as beautiful as they were the day they died. And in the background, music plays. We don't know where the music comes from but none of us care. And they dance. Our daughters dance in the field.'

She puts the soapy dish down and cries. I thought her awful memory had been triggered. As I reached out to touch her shoulder, she turned with tears in her eyes and with something on her face I hadn't seen in half a decade - a smile. She raised her hands and exclaimed 'I've been having the same dream!'

Credits:

On The Edges Of Death, There Are Lights

Matt McKechnie: synth

Endeavour To Fly

Matt McKechnie: guitars, bass, vocals, tambo

Rehuel Ernest: drums

Tyrone Warner: lead guitar, synths

End Of All Things

Matt McKechnie: guitars, bass, vocals, tambo

Rehuel Ernest: drums

Lonely With You

Matt McKechnie: guitars, knee slapping, vocals

Oath

Matt McKechnie: guitars, vocals, synth

Between The Walls

Matt McKechnie: guitars, vocals, bass, drums, shakers

Megachernobyl

Matt McKechnie: drums, guitars, synths, bass, vocals, shakers

The Waves, They Come

Matt McKechnie: guitars, bass, synths, vocals

Rehuel Ernest: drums

Wander Onward

Matt McKechnie: guitars, drums, bass, vocals, piano

Dean Watson: guitar solo

Dancing Daughters Of The Field

Matt McKechnie: drums, guitars, synths, bass, vocals

All songs mixed and mastered by Glen Teeple.

Produced by Matt McKechnie

'Zenith The Meadow' story written by Matt McKechnie